

The Picture of Dorian Gray – yet unwritten opera in 3 acts

About January 2010 the work on my opera *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, libretto by Alasdair Middleton, begins. The Premiere will be in fall 2013 by the Danish National Opera.

Briefly about the idea: the staging of the opera will draw inspiration from the almost commedia del arte-like qualities of the figures in the novel. There will be no singers on stage, only commedia del arte performers and dancers. Each singer - singing from the orchestra pit - will have a corresponding commedia del arte performer on stage. The main idea of the stage concept is that the commedia del arte performers will represent the characters of the story, and the dancers will represent everything to do with dreams, illusions and supernatural beings. The only link between those two spheres will be Dorian, half image and half real. This idea has proven to make a lot more sense for the treatment than I originally hoped for, and the work on this idea with the chief dramaturg of the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen Jesper Bergman was a revelation for me.

Everyone familiar with the novel will notice some radical changes we had to make in order to make the opera function. The deroute of Dorian is changed, leaving out the fascination of the book, some characters is left out, some scenes (chapters) has been reinvented, the ending is changed.

My thoughts on the music for this opera: to me, the novel is about accepting reality as it is – or not doing so, escaping it by the power of imagination. This theme – by the way – is to me the theme, which gives this novel its contemporary importance. Henry has imaginations of a hedonistic way of life, which he preaches but hardly lives himself; Sybil lives the imagination of the playwrights in her theatre (and facing reality, she kills herself); Basil wants to see the virtues in Dorian and does not see what a person he really is; and above all, the imagination of Dorian becomes reality, which is the experiment of the story. To me, the only figure in the novel who lives in reality is James Vane, which is the reason why it was very important to keep him in the opera, although his presence in the novel is quite brief.

All this gave me the idea of an escapist musical universe as a dominant musical flavour. The beginning of the 20th century has music, which almost bursts with this flavour: Mahler, Richard Strauss, early Schoenberg, Alban Berg. To me, it is a music full of almost insane idealism, also of longing. I would like to find a musical perspective, which brings this flavour into our contemporary 2009 age. It is hard to describe this music, but it has all the romantic qualities of fin de siècle German romantic music (f.ex. the composers mentioned), seen through a dream mirror, which reflects the time gone by since then. It will be a contemporary but highly aesthetic music. This music will be in the foreground most of the opera. A more true and frightening music lurks underneath and becomes more present when reality breaks through on stage. The ultimate breakthrough of this music happens at the moment in the end where Dorian dies. I am thinking of this moment as the moment where this lurking, frightening music is let out in the open and shows itself as not only frightening, but also beautiful – not in a romantic sense, but in a contemporary sense. Reality prevails, and though this moment is a moment of horror, it is at the same time a moment of beauty.